

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

EASTERN DISTRICT OF WISCONSIN

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

WILLIE EARL WILLIAMS

CASE NUMBER: 08-111MCAEG

I, Matthew D. Niezgoda, the undersigned complainant, being duly sworn, state the following is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief:

On or about September 16, 2005, in the State and Eastern District of Wisconsin, the defendant herein fraudulently applied for and received FEMA disaster assistance funds related to Hurricane Katrina in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 287.

I further state that I am a Special Agent with the United States Department of Homeland Security, and this complaint is based on the following facts:

Please see the attached affidavit of Special Agent Matthew D. Niezgoda.

Continued on the attached sheet and made a part hereof: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Matthew D. Niezgoda
Signature of Complainant

Sworn to before me and subscribed in my presence,

October 14, 2008
Date

The Honorable Aaron E. Goodstein
United States Magistrate Judge
Name & Title of Judicial Officer

at Milwaukee, Wisconsin
City and State
Aaron E. Goodstein
Signature of Judicial Officer

I, Matthew D. Niezgoda, being duly sworn, state as follows:

1. I am a Special Agent of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Office of Inspector General (OIG). I have been employed by the DHS-OIG for approximately one year. My primary investigative responsibilities have been DHS employee misconduct and fraud related to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) individual disaster assistance program.
2. I am currently involved in an investigation regarding alleged violations of federal law committed by Willie Earl Williams, date of birth August 4, 1968. These violations stem from Williams fraudulently receiving FEMA disaster assistance funds related to Hurricane Katrina. The investigation has established probable cause to believe that Williams has violated 18 U.S.C. § 287 (False Claims).
3. To establish a violation of § 287, the government must establish the following:

First, that the defendant made or presented a claim against a department or agency of the United States;

Second, that the claim was false or fraudulent;

Third, that the defendant knew the claim was false or fraudulent; and

Fourth, that the defendant acted with the intent to defraud.
4. The information set forth below is based on my personal knowledge, or has been obtained through interviews with other individuals noted below, or stems from the my review of numerous records obtained during the investigation.
5. On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the state of Mississippi. In response, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster number 1604 was declared. Victims of the disaster could apply to FEMA for disaster relief assistance. If an applicant met the eligibility criteria, he/she would be awarded disaster relief grants for replacement of personal property and housing assistance based upon his/her loss and need. Eligibility requirements, as outlined in Title 44, Chapter 1, § 206.101 of the Code of Federal Regulations, include that a victim's primary residence was rendered unlivable by the disaster.
6. On December 26, 2007, I received the results of an investigation into the FEMA disaster assistance claim filed by Willie Earl Williams in conjunction with Hurricane Katrina's landfall on August 29, 2005. FEMA Fraud Unit Investigator (FPU) Mark Ochab conducted this investigation, and his report shows that Williams initially claimed 245 McDonald Square, Biloxi, MS 39531 as his damaged primary residence. Subsequent documents that Williams submitted to FEMA contain variations of the street name and of the zip code. Several months later, Williams claimed 1550 E. 2nd St, Apt E20, Pass Christian, MS 39571 as his

damaged residence; Williams sometimes listed Apt E20 as "E20 Lower" and claimed that this complex had upper and lower units.

7. The report also showed that Williams appears to have submitted falsified documents to FEMA in support of his claim for disaster assistance. Among these documents is a water bill purportedly for 245 McDonnell Square, Biloxi, MS 39531. "BILL ISSUED BY HOCUTT, INC." is typewritten on this bill. Hocutt, Inc. provides submetering and billing services and is based in Dallas, Texas.
8. On September 8, 2008, I spoke to Hocutt, Inc. Executive Vice President Kevin Hammer who confirmed that his company has never done business in the State of Mississippi.
9. Also included in the submitted documents is a lease agreement that Williams purportedly entered into on December 2, 2004 with Angela Beckum of Longwood Apartments for the residence located at 1550 East Second Street, Apartment E20 (lower), Pass Christian, Mississippi 39571.
10. On separate occasions -- including May 26, 2006, June 1, 2006, and June 21, 2006 -- Williams sent applications for FEMA disaster assistance, as well as supporting documents, to FEMA via fax from the Eastern District of Wisconsin.
11. The complex at 1550 East Second Street is actually called Penthouse Garden Apartments. The property manager has confirmed that the property does not employ an individual named Angela Beckum and that the property never has been called Longwood Apartments.
12. On December 27, 2007, I spoke to MCI Customer Service Representative "Vanessa" in an attempt to verify the authenticity of a phone bill that Williams has submitted on several occasions to FEMA. Vanessa stated that the account number on the bill, "4LF435", was not a valid MCI account number.
13. On March 24, 2008, I received subscriber records from MCI via subpoena for the phone number (228) 575-4063. Williams at various times has listed this number as the phone number at his damaged dwelling, and it appears on the previously mentioned phone bill that he has submitted to FEMA. The records show that this phone number was registered to Willie Williams of 1550 E. 2nd St, Apt E20, Pass Christian, MS 39571 from May 3, 2004 until January 25, 2005.
14. Also on March 24, 2008, I received a written, sworn statement from Rebecca Walker, who also filed a disaster assistance claim for the address 1550 E. 2nd St, Apt E20, Pass Christian, MS 39571. Walker stated that she resided at this address from approximately January 25 or 26, 2005 until the day of the hurricane, August 29, 2005. She further stated that the only other resident in her unit during that time was her husband, Edward; Walker did not know anyone named Willie Earl Williams. According to Walker, only one Apartment E20 existed in the complex.

15. On March 25, 2008, I reviewed the original FEMA disaster assistance file of Willie Earl Williams, Social Security Number 351-62-1462. According to the file, on September 16, 2005, Williams completed FEMA Form 90-69 (FEMA Application/Registration for Disaster Assistance) by contacting the FEMA disaster helpline. Williams' application listed 245 McDonald Square, Biloxi, MS 39531 as his primary residence, and as the residence that was damaged on August 29, 2005 by Hurricane Katrina. Williams provided the mailing address 13447 N. Central Expy, Ste 303, Dallas, TX 75243 and the phone number (214) 535-5881 as his contact information at the time. The file also showed that on May 26, 2006, Williams submitted a new, handwritten, FEMA Form 90-69 in which he listed 1550 E. 2nd Street, #E20, Pass Christian, MS 39571 as his residence damaged by the hurricane. Williams also included a handwritten note in which he appears to deny living at 245 McDonald Square, Biloxi, MS 39531, which was the address he previously claimed.

16. As a result of Williams' application, he received the following disbursements into bank accounts under his name:

September 19, 2005	\$2,000.00	First National Bank of Texas
December 18, 2005	\$2,358.00	First National Bank of Texas
January 20, 2006	\$2,289.00	JP Morgan Chase Bank
May 12, 2006	\$2,115.00	JP Morgan Chase Bank
June 6, 2006	\$1,857.00	JP Morgan Chase Bank
October 5, 2006	\$2,115.00	JP Morgan Chase Bank
October 11, 2006	\$2,376.17	JP Morgan Chase Bank
October 31, 2006	\$11,089.83	JP Morgan Chase Bank

17. Williams directly received a total of \$26,200 in FEMA disaster assistance funds.

18. On March 26, 2008, FEMA FPU Investigator Ochab provided me with two documents that were submitted to FEMA by Rebecca Walker in support of her claim. The first document is a handwritten note from Cheryl Sexton, property manager for Penthouse Garden Apartments. In the note Sexton verifies that Rebecca Walker lived at 1550 East 2nd Street, Apt. E20, Pass Christian, MS 39571 from January 23, 2005 through August 29, 2005. The second supporting document is a typewritten letter from the Customer Service Center of the Mississippi Power Company. The letter confirms that power service to 1550 East 2nd Street, Apt. E20, Pass Christian, MS 39571 was in the name of Edward R. Walker from January 31, 2005 through September 22, 2005.

19. On June 6, 2008, I received a report from Corporate Lodging Consultants (CLC), who was the contractor that issued direct rental payments to landlords for FEMA on behalf of Williams. The records revealed that CLC had disbursed approximately \$13,560.00 in rental assistance payments to landlords on Williams' behalf from approximately December 2006 through January 2008.

20. On August 1, 2008, DHS-OIG Special Agent in Charge Armando Lopez and I interviewed Angela Beckum at her residence in Madison, WI. Beckum stated that she met Williams around April 4, 2006 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, but did not know how long he had been residing in Milwaukee or where he was residing at the time of the hurricane. While Williams was in Milwaukee, Beckum saw him writing various letters to FEMA as well as altering various documents to further his scheme. She could not recall which specific documents she had witnessed Williams altering.
21. Beckum admitted that she posed as Williams' landlord to assist him in receiving rental assistance. While posing as Williams' landlord, she used her mother's name, Annie Beckum.
22. Records show that the \$13,560.00 in rental assistance payments described in paragraph 19 above all were made to Annie Beckum at 4030 N. 44th Street in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
23. According to Angela Beckum, her mother would endorse the checks and turn them over to Angela, who then would deposit the checks -- at Williams' direction -- in Annie Beckum's account at Tri City Bank in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Annie Beckum then would write checks payable to Williams, and Angela Beckum would deliver the checks to Williams.
24. Williams has received -- either directly or through the rental assistance payments described in paragraphs 19, 22, and 23 above -- approximately \$39,760 in FEMA disaster aid benefits funds he was not entitled to receive.
25. Based on the facts set forth above, it appears that Williams did not reside at 245 McDonald Square, Biloxi, MS 39531 or at 1550 East 2nd Street, Apt. E20, Pass Christian, MS 39571 when Hurricane Katrina struck Mississippi on August 29, 2005. It therefore further appears that Williams' claim that he did live at those residences -- a claim made to FEMA, which is an agency of the United States -- was a false one that Williams made with the intent to fraudulently obtain disaster aid benefits.